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TITLE: Project M: A Wholistic Approach to Healthy Sex for HIV+ Gay and Bisexual Men

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ISSUE: The vast majority of HIV risk-reduction programs have focused on negative people or on the general population. Very few prevention programs have focused on positive people and on helping them to engage in healthy behaviors in order to maximize their own health and to prevent the transmission of HIV to their partners/families.

SETTING: Project M has been implemented in various cities throughout Connecticut. The intervention has occurred in CBO's in gay men's homes, and in retreat settings. The intended audience is HIV+ gay and bisexual men.

PROJECT: To address this issue, an innovative S-session group workshop entitled Project M was developed for HIV+ provides a safe forum for men to talk openly and frankly about a range of issues related to healthy sex and relationships such as oral sex, the Reality Condom, HIV disclosure, creative sex, sexual rights, spiritual health, and boosting one's immune system. The goal of the workshop is to encourage HIV+ men to take charge of their health and their sex lives. The project is based on the IMB model of Fisher and Fisher (1992), which contends that if the participants are provided with the necessary information, motivation, and skills development, they will choose to engage in behaviors that will maximize their own health and the health of their partners. HIV+ gay/bisexual men facilitate all of the workshops. The workshop has been offered both as an 8-week workshop and as a 2½-day weekend workshop. The workshop is evaluated by having the participants fill out self-report measures.

RESULTS: 43 men have completed the workshop (16 in the 8-week workshop; 27 in the weekend workshop). Participants rated on a scale from 1 (much less likely) to 7 (much more likely) how much more likely they were to practice safer sex as a result of the workshop; the mean rating was 6.06 for the 8-week workshop and 6.62 for the end workshop. They reported that the workshop impacted on them in the following ways: (1) helped them to be creative in their sex lives (68.8% reported this in the 8-week workshop (A)) vs. 92.6% in the weekend workshop (B), (2) helped them to learn how to talk to their partners about safer sex (81.3% (A) vs. 96.3% (B)), (3) helped them to sexual situations (75.0% (A) vs. 96.3% (B)), (4) increased their motivation to practice, and (5) made safer sex more erotic and enjoyable (68.8% (A) vs. 85.2% (B)).

CONCLUSIONS: Providing a safe environment where HIV+ gay/bisexual men can come together to talk about sexual health and relationships in a sex-positive manner can be an effective risk-reduction strategy. Project M is an example of this. With a sound theoretical model at its foundation along with input from gay/bisexual men in its development, Project M has effectively empowered men to take charge of their sex lives. By focusing on a broad range of sexual health issues and by respecting HIV+ gay/bisexual men to make informed choices about their sex lives, project M has helped men to learn some of the skills that are necessary to have a satisfying and healthy sex life as an HIV+ man.

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